

Testimony of Kathryn Goldberg
Connecticut School Counselor Association
in regards to

**H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Kathryn Goldberg and I am a school counselor in New Haven, CT, serving students from New Haven and Bridgeport. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. **Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.**

This year is my 11th year working in a public charter high school serving students from Bridgeport and New Haven, but this year has proven to be more chaotic and disorienting than any previous year. The disruptions to in-person learning over the past 18+ months and the dissolution of many of the formal and informal structures that helped high schoolers learn to manage their emotions, their motivation, and their educational learning and progress have been significant. I have seen more fighting, vandalism, absenteeism, avoidance and social media bullying than ever before. These challenges, coupled with national trends in staff departures/resignations, have taxed counselors (and teachers) in ways that are simply exhausting.

My school counseling role specifically focuses on college and career counseling (post-secondary planning); the challenges students are exhibiting in terms of both social-emotional and executive functioning as a result of the trauma and decreased supports during the pandemic have made it incredibly difficult for students to navigate the college admissions process effectively. Additionally, we lost so much time to teach writing skills, self-advocacy skills, personal organization, and time management that students are struggling to keep up with the heavy writing demands of college applications and manage the many, many detailed elements embedded in the financial aid process. While navigating the college admissions and financial aid processes may not be directly related to mental health and social-emotional learning, they are tangentially connected in the sense that these opportunities support students to feel hopeful and optimistic about their futures. The amount of time and energy needed to teach these skills in real-time means that I am unable to accomplish as much in a day as I could in previous year, taking away from the ability to meet all students unless I work longer days and weeks. Although students' needs increased this year, we do not have more counselors than previous years in order to appropriately meet student needs.

For the primarily low-income, first-generation college students of color who I support, not being able to spend the time that I know kids need to create post-secondary pathways that will break intergenerational cycles of poverty is heartbreaking and does not allow me to practice counseling in a socially just manner. So, rather than leaving students alone to navigate these challenges, I have chosen to sacrifice personal time through late evenings and weekend phone calls with

students and parents to help them meet deadlines and open access to post-secondary pathways they want to pursue.

Ultimately, I worry about the socioeconomic and mental health of the cities of Bridgeport and New Haven if an entire generation of high schools students do not have access to meaningful post-secondary pathways that create lives of choice and opportunity as a ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before COVID, Connecticut had significant room for growth in ensuring all students K-12 have access to a school counselor: we ranked 37th for counselor to student ratios with a ratio of 1:457 as of 2018-2019, and only 25% of our elementary schools have school counselors.

To address these concerns, I urge the appropriations committee consider appropriating funds specifically for school counseling, specifically to increase the number of school counselors in all schools in Connecticut from kindergarten through high school.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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